PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

At the annual meeting of the Society on September 27th, 1945, Professor Henry Alcock, M.A., delivered his presidential address, in the course of which references were made to Queensland Governors and their influence upon the intellectual life of the State.

[The first half of this address was summarised in the News Bulletin issued to members with the notices for the October meeting. From this abstract are omitted most of the references made to the early governors of Queensland and attention is mainly confined to those of whom the author was able to learn something from first-hand sources. Members desiring a brief account of the Governors of Queensland will find one, chatty and anecdotal, on pp. 347-378 of "Queensland—Our Seventh Political Decade," by C. A. Bernays.]

The functions of the representative of the British Crown in a colony or dominion may be roughly summed up as political, social, military and constitutional. When Sir George Ferguson Bowen, one of the most learned of those representatives, assumed office in 1859 as the first "Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief" of the newly-constituted Colony of Queensland, it was not specifically a part of his duty to promote education, art, music and literature among its people. Nevertheless he, and many of his successors, did, as a matter of fact, set an example of interest in developments other than the merely material.

While it is true that a governor may make his own opportunities in that field, it is also true that he has to exercise discretion there as well as in his relations with his political advisers. It is not enough that a group of earnest citizens should pursue a worthy object; to attract vice-regal patronage it must give indisputable evidence of its stability, its loyalty, its resources of personnel and financial means, and, perhops most important, its capacity and willingness to avoid unseemly embroilment in political or sectarian disputes.

A governor need not be an artist or a scientist to perceive the value of spontaneous efforts within the community over which he presides to develop art or science, any more than it is obligatory for a musical critic to be a fine executant. Mr. Bernays, usually so kind in his comments on those in high places, was unnecessarily harsh when he drew attention to Sir Her-

bert Chermside's lack of knowledge of geography, displayed at a meeting of the Geographical Society. Sir Herbert actually did his duty there as he understood it; he lent distinction to a useful movement.

He came to office, succeeding the more brilliant Lord Lamington, in 1902, at a time when it was uncertain how far the federation of Australia would depress the standing of the several States. It seems to have been temporarily assumed that mere competency in the service of the Crown (Governor Chermside had a long and creditable military and administrative career) would suffice in a position of lowered status. That the mistake was realised is shown by the appointment as his successor, of that remarkable man—possibly the most distinguished of all our governors—Lord Chelmsford, appointed, be it observed, by the same government which had sent out Sir Herbert Chermside.

Lord Chelmsford was not content with the routine blessing of good endeavour. He set himself to bring out to this State men of ability, especially in view of the approaching foundation of a local university, which he did much to promote. There is little doubt that it would have been his name, instead of that of Sir William Macgregor, which would have appeared on the dedicatory stone at the entrance to the University, had it not been for an unfortunate quarrel with Premier Kidston.

While there cannot be gainsaid the direct contribution of men like Lord Chelmsford to the intellectual advancement of the people of Queensland, it may be questioned whether it is in all cases desirable that a governor should participate actively and in person in the direction of learned or semi-learned societies within his territory, unless he is professionally equipped for that task, as was Sir John Goodwin, an eminent medical scientist. This may be brought out more clearly by a brief contrast between the service to local cultural endeavour of Sir William Macgregor and Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams respectively. The former, the first chancellor of the University of Queensland, was assiduous in the preparation of memoranda for the guidance of those who were engaged upon the institution of courses of instruction, the rules for which still bear some traces of their partly Aberdonian origin. The stocky Sir William, with his piercing, far-looking light-blue eyes, the eyes of the explorer, such as some of us remember

seeing in Sir Hubert Wilkins and Sir Edgeworth David, inspired not the slightest resentment by this activity, for he was sure of his ground, and his manifold capacity, never presumptuously exaggerated, evoked a sincere respect quite unassociated with that due to him as His Majesty's representative.

Sir William Macgregor gave his counsel, encouragement and patronage to the foundation of the Historical Society of Queensland in 1913 and used his influence to secure it some initial accommodation. His successor, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams, continued the vice-regal patronage of the Society and even presided at one of its regular meetings. His manner was, however, somewhat irritable and he was not consulted on the affairs of the Society in the same expectation of helpful service as was his predecessor. There can be little doubt that the deterioration of his health, which gradually limited his recreations to Ludo and the polishing of Queensland opals, prevented him from taking as effective a part in social inspiration as he would have desired. Yet he travelled extensively in the State and stood to his duty even while seriously unwell.

Altogether different was Sir Matthew Nathan, a man of long and outstanding experience as a public servant and administrator. His restless mind impelled him to investigate all the resources of the State now committed to his charge, cultural as well as material. Few were those investigations which did not result in fruitful suggestions. His nature was essentially kindly and humane, but he somehow lacked the capacity to control the exhibition on his mobile features of his disapprobation of what seemed to him evidence of neglect or ineptitude. Moreover he was born to command as well as to serve. Consequently, when he became chancellor of the University, he neglected the amiable precedent set by Sir William Macgregor and was inclined to rule as well as reign. His intentions throughout were always admirable and reinforced by considerable study and immense persistence. An outstanding instance is found in his patronage of both the Historical Society and the Geographical Society, which he brought to form a joint committee for the study, investigation and registration of Queensland place-names. That committee met under his personal chairmanship and was ruled with a rod of iron, none the less felt for being held in a velvet glove. Sir Matthew obtained money

from the Government for his project and also spent money of his own upon it. During his tours of the State he was indefatigable in collecting information from old settlers. Much of this, duly entered upon cards in Brisbane, is now found to be inaccurate—the local settlers felt they **had** to give His Excellency some auswer, so, when they did not know, they just guessed. The lay members of the committee were unable to keep up the pace set by the Governor and, when he left the State, the committee soon died. Some years late it was revived on a departmental, not a society, basis.

Sir John Goodwin offered another contrast. His voice was not strong and he seldom made an elaborate address; but, when he did, it was with excellently chosen and tested information taken from within his own special field of professional study. In that way he promoted science by example, but no one could have been more free from suspicion of being dictatorial or overbearing.

These instances have been selected, not as giving a view of the cultural influences exercised by our successive governors, for that field has been by no means covered, but as showing how, especially during the present century, the attitude of the governor has tended to adjust itself to that of the growing community, growing in intellectual stature and self-consciousness as well as in numbers. They also show, perhaps, that a governor has most influence when he chooses to lead rather than drive.

We have been very fortunate in having the ancient British Crown represented in this part of the world by able and sympathetic gentlemen who do not command, but inspire our respect for themselves and for what they represent. To none of them do we owe more gratitude and esteem than to our Patron, His Excellency Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, whose advice and support have never been withheld. He it was who opened Newstead House as a historical museum and as the headquarters of our Society. He has taken an informed interest in kindred societies and has spread throughout Queensland knowledge of their activities, thus bringing numerous additions to their membership and extending the opportunity for cultural association and co-operation. His record tenure of office is, to our intense regret, soon to end, but we hope he may be able to revisit Queensland at some time during his well-earned leisure.